

Towards a Regional War in Central Africa: Rwandan and Ugandan Troops Enter The Congo (DRC)

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Rwandan and Ugandan troops have been reported in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the past two weeks, but reporting is scant and neither the U.S., the U.N. Security Council nor any other members of the international community have spoken to this, the latest Rwandan and Ugandan violation of Congo's sovereignty. The international community has instead been focused on the constitutional crisis in Congo's neighbor, Burundi.

Transcript

KPFA Evening News Anchor: Unrest and political oppression in the African Great Lakes Region continue to cause fears of a regional war. The Democratic Republic of the Congo's government accuses both Uganda and Rwanda of sending troops across the borders they share in Congo's resource rich east.



M23 commander Sultani Makenga, during M23's occupation of the eastern Congolese city of Goma in 2013

At the same time, Burundi's constitutional crisis threatens to engage its neighbors, Rwanda and Congo. KPFA's Ann Garrison spoke to international criminal defense attorney and former law professor Peter Erlinder about the U.N. Security Council's response.

KPFA/Ann Garrison: Peter Erlinder, the U.N. Security Council has not responded to credible reports of Ugandan and Rwandan troops in DR Congo, even though this is a clear violation of the U.N.'s founding principle, the equal sovereignty of member states.

Peter Erlinder: Yes, of course it is, but there's been a long history of that. We know that as early as 1997, Uganda and Rwanda invaded the Congo and set up their own puppet government and have repeatedly invaded and occupied large portions of the Congo because of the desire to control the wealth in the eastern part of the Congo. That is the goal of Rwandan and Ugandan elites, if not the governments themselves.

KPFA: OK, the U.N. Force Intervention Brigade drove Rwanda and Uganda's M23 proxy militia back into Rwanda and Uganda in 2013. Isn't the UNSC legally or theoretically obliged to respond to these cross border incursions again?

Peter Erlinder: Well, it would seem logically that the U.N. Security Council would be obligated to follow through on the obligation that they took up to remove M23. But M23 was, as you know, essentially under the control of the Rwandan government, and the United States and the United Kingdom support Rwanda and Uganda, so it remains to be seen whether the U.S. and U.K. will have the Security Council follow out on that mandate.

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KPFA: On Friday, Russia and China blocked a U.N. Security Council resolution to censure Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza for seeking a third term, which his supporters claim he's constitutionally entitled to do. Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters, "It's not the business of the Security Council and the U.N. Charter to get involved in constitutional matters of sovereign states." Could you comment on that?



Peter Erlinder

Peter Erlinder: Yeah, this is one of the things that the Security Council has had to contend with, now that Russia and China have begun to actively use the veto again, which they weren't able to do for about 20 years. The U.N. Security Council should not involve itself in the internal affairs of a sovereign country. At least at this point, the question of whether the Burundian president can properly run for a third term or not is an internal question for the Burundians.

That's different than the situation of the M23 proxy militia in the Congo, because that of course is an invading force that was in Congo, and the U.N. was there to help drive them out. So Russia and China are quite correct.

KPFA: Today Burundi's defense minister suggested that he might intervene in Burundi's constitutional crisis. That would no doubt violate Burundi's Constitution, but it would still be Burundi's issue, wouldn't it?

Peter Erlinder: Well, it might lead to some sort of a conflict within Burundi, but whether it violates Burundi's Constitution more or less than the decision to run for a third term again gets us back to this being a Burundian question and a struggle for the Burundian people to resolve. This isn't an international question unless, of course, someone decides to make it so.

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KPFA: OK, the US hasn't remarked on the Rwandan and Ugandan troops in Congo, but it has called on Burundi's Nkurunziza to step down and not seek a third term - and sent a special envoy rushing off to Bujumbura. Legalities aside, what do you think the USA's primary interests are?

Peter Erlinder: Well, what we can see since 1990, when the Ugandan military, made up of Rwandan troops, invaded Rwanda, is that the U.S. has played a major role, through proxies, in influencing the politics and the reality of life in Central Africa. Whether that role has been one that's been approved by the Security Council or not has varied from time to time, whether it's been legal or not has varied from time to time, but the U.S. has been constant in attempting to influence affairs in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and certainly in the Congo.

So I think U.S. primary interests are to remain a player in influencing the outcome of who controls power in all of the Great Lakes states. I think this is consistent with that.

KPFA: OK, Peter Erlinder, thank you for speaking to KPFA.

Peter Erlinder: OK, thanks Ann.

KPFA: For [Pacifica](#), [KPFA](#) and [AfrobeatRadio](#), I'm Ann Garrison.

*Oakland writer **Ann Garrison** writes for the [San Francisco Bay View](#), *Black Agenda Report*, *Black Star News*, [Counterpunch](#), [Colored Opinions](#) and her own website, [Ann Garrison](#), and produces for [AfrobeatRadio](#) on WBAI-NYC, [KPFA Evening News](#), [KPFA Flashpoints](#) and for her own YouTube Channel, [AnnieGetYourGang](#). She can be reached at anniegarrison@gmail.com. In March 2014 she was awarded the [Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza Democracy and Peace Prize](#) for promoting peace in the Great Lakes Region of Africa through her reporting.*

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